

IN THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims is provided for reference purposes:

1. (Previously presented) A method of conducting business comprising the steps of:
 - establishing a computer-network based contract trading system electronically accessible by traders, said trading system including a plurality of trading accounts, each trader on the trading system being associated with at least one of the trading accounts;
 - establishing, on said trading system, a plurality of separate contracts within contract bundles, each contract bundle paying off an aggregate fixed sum at maturity, the aggregate fixed sum at maturity known when the contract bundles are established, and wherein each contract bundle comprises at least two separate contracts;
 - selling, over said trading system, at least one of the plurality of separate contracts within the contract bundles;
 - accepting for resale over said trading system, the at least one of the plurality of separate contracts within the contract bundles;
 - settling the at least one of the plurality of separate contracts against the trading account of the trader of said separate contract; and
 - assessing a transaction fee for at least one of said steps of selling, accepting for resale, or settling of the at least one of the plurality of separate contracts.
2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the computer-network based contract trading system is electronically accessible by traders via at least the Internet.
3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2, further comprising the step of providing a user interface that allows traders to access said contract trading system.
4. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein the user interface is a world-wide-web user interface.

5. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein said user interface allows any computer-network user to view information about said trading system.

6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein said user interface allows only predetermined computer-network users to view information about said trading system.

7. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein each of said separate contracts pays off a fixed sum or a zero sum depending on an outcome of a future event.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of:

receiving data from a prospective trader identifying a predetermined phenomenon for which a separate contract is desired, the phenomenon having at least two future possible outcomes at a time of maturity.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8, wherein the step of selling includes selling a contract bundle comprising at least two separate contracts, each of said at least two separate contracts corresponding to one of said at least two future possible outcomes of said future event.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: prior to the step of establishing the plurality of separate contracts within contract bundles, determining whether a future event for which at least one contract bundle is desired is suitable for issuance of the at least one contracts bundle thereon.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, wherein said future event has a recurring regular occurrence and wherein said method further comprises the steps of:

establishing over said trading system, a plurality of contract bundles, each

contract bundle comprising at least two separate contracts, at least one of said plurality of contract bundles having a time period from a sale thereof to an expiration thereof which partially overlaps the time period from a sale of another of said plurality of contract bundles until an expiration of said another of said plurality of contract bundles, said at least one of said plurality of contract bundles corresponding to a first periodic occurrence of said future event and said another of said plurality of contract bundles corresponding to a second periodic occurrence of said future event.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein for each one of said plurality of contract bundles, a corresponding expiration thereof corresponds to a timing of a specific periodic occurrence of said future event associated therewith.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of:

establishing over said trading system, a contract bundle associated with a specific periodic occurrence of said future event at substantially the same time as an expiration of a contract bundle associated with another periodic occurrence of said future event.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the steps of selling and settling are accomplished in a credit-risk free manner.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein: the step of selling is on margin; and the step of selling and the step of settling are accomplished in a credit-risk manner.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of accepting an indicia of an identity from at least one of the traders.

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 16, wherein the steps of selling, accepting for resale, settling, or assessing over said trading system are only with respect to the at least one of the traders having said indicia.

18. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein only a predetermined group of traders may access the trading system.

19. (Previously presented) The method of claim 18, wherein said predetermined group is selected from the group consisting of predefined and prequalified traders.

20. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: introducing a plurality of new contracts to the trading system as a split of an existing separate contract, an aggregate liquidation value of the plurality of new contracts equaling the liquidation value of the existing separate contract which was split.

21. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, further comprising the step of: concurrent with said step of introducing said plurality of new contracts to the trading system as a split of an existing separate contract, retiring said existing separate contract which was split.

22. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: receiving at least two existing separate contracts prior to a maturity thereof; and introducing a new contract to the trading system as a combination of said at least two existing separate contracts, a liquidation value of the new contract equaling an aggregate of the liquidation value of said at least two existing contracts.

23. (Previously presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising the step of: soliciting, over said trading system, a trader for delivery of said at least one new contracts, which completes a contract bundle, prior to a maturity thereof.

24. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said step of settling said separate contract includes settling said separate contracts at an expiration thereof.

25. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising accepting the at least two separate contracts comprising said contract bundles for redemption prior to an expiration thereof.

26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: providing a market authority for mediating any dispute related to said trading system.

27. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising establishing a computer-network based contract trading system accessible by non-trading observers.

28. (Previously presented) A computer network-based contract trading system, including a communications interface, a plurality of processing modules for formation, sale, resale and settlement of separate contracts within contract bundles, each of said contract bundles comprising at least two separate contracts wherein each contract bundle pays off an aggregate fixed sum at maturity, the aggregate fixed sum at maturity known upon the formation of the contract bundles, the improvement comprising:

means for enabling market participants to trade separate contracts directly with other market participants, and not through third parties.

29-95 (Cancelled)

96. (Previously presented) The computer network-based contract trading system of claim 28, wherein said market participants are anonymous to each other.

97-103 (Cancelled)

104. (Previously presented) The method of conducting business of Claim 1, wherein each said contract bundle comprises two separate contracts.

105. (Previously presented) The computer network-based contract trading system of Claim 28, wherein each of said contract bundles comprises two separate contracts.

106-112 (Cancelled)

113. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising forming and reselling over said trading system contracts comprised of two or more of said separate contracts packaged together.

114. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising at least two separate contracts within a contract bundle paying off an amount contingent upon a future event such that a payout by one of the separate contracts within the contract bundle excludes payout by any other separate contract within the contract bundle.

115. (Previously presented) The method of claim 114, further comprising all of the separate contracts combined within the contract bundle exhausting all possible contingencies of the future event, such that the contract bundle as a whole has a fixed certain value payable on the future event.

116-123 (Cancelled)

124. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising assessing a transaction fee for a reselling of the at least one of the plurality of separate contracts.

125-126 (Cancelled)